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TRAINING COURSE ON KEY ISSUES ON THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AGENDA PURSUANT TO PARAGRAPH 166 OF THE UNCTAD X PLAN OF ACTION

Final evaluation by both participants and supervisors on the extent to which there has been an impact on their work and on the lessons learnt

Report by the UNCTAD secretariat

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INTRODUCTION

1. The UNCTAD secretariat, as envisaged in its report TD/B/EX(28)/2, conducted a final evaluation of the training course on key issues on the international economic agenda. This evaluation was to assess the impact of the training course on the work of the 18 participants six months after the end of the training course, i.e. in December 2001. The evaluation would also document what lessons, if any, the participants have learnt. A corresponding questionnaire was sent out to the supervisors of each participant in the sending Department for their views on the impact the course has had on the participant's work in the Department.

2. The evaluation forms were sent to participants and supervisors in December 2001. The secretariat received replies to this final evaluation from 15 participants (five out of six LDCs) and 13 supervisors (four out of six LDCs) in January-February 2002. Despite efforts by the secretariat, it was not possible to receive comments to questionnaires from the remaining three participants and five supervisors.

3. This report contains the analysis of the responses by each participant on the training course, the impact the course had on their professional development in the sending Department, and the lessons they have learned. Supervisors' assessment on the value added of this training course, especially the impact it has had on the work of the participant and what the contribution has been to the Department, has also been analysed.

Chapter I

PERSONAL EVALUATION

4. Participants and supervisors evaluated various pedagogic issues, including the improvement of knowledge, its application in the performance of their duties at Departments, what integration, if any, of participants has taken place in the Department, and the dissemination to colleagues in the sending Department and other Ministries or institutions of information and knowledge gained at the training course.

A. Improvement in knowledge of international economic issues

5. All participants felt that their knowledge of international economic issues had widened, and eight participants stated particularly that the course had substantively enhanced their understanding of linkages between trade, investment and finance and the interdependence of national development strategies and domestic and foreign investment policies. Five participants felt that an improvement was noticeable. There was a better understanding of WTO-related matters, and most found the views expressed by UNCTAD useful and thought-provoking. All supervisors were familiar with the content and objective of the training course, and six felt that there had been a substantive improvement in the participants' knowledge of international economic issues. Others felt that their participants already possessed a strong background, or that their policy formulation skills were already good, or that they demonstrated knowledge of issues before attending the courses, but the improvement of their knowledge of international economic issues was still noticeable.

B. Application of knowledge and information and professional disposition

6. All participants reported frequent application of the knowledge and information gained at the course. Seven participants applied these to a large extent to matters related to analysis of economic significance and also where technical advice was given to other ministries that dealt with trade and development matters, as well as institutions that coordinated science and technology. Several participants reported participation in meetings and workshops to prepare briefing papers for the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha, in the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration and in regional cooperation matters. Participants are regularly exposed to work in their Department at a higher level; for instance, one participant is now interacting daily with stakeholders and trade diplomats in Geneva in all areas of trade policy formulation and trade diplomacy, while another frequently follows up on activities in the international economy and its impact on the national economy.

7. Most supervisors were also satisfied that participants were able to apply to a large extent the knowledge and information gained at the course. One supervisor reported a marked improvement in a participant when dealing with economic issues, which, prior to the course, had proved difficult for the participant.

8. All participants and supervisors reported that there had been a positive impact in the professional disposition of participants towards their jobs. Some participants reported that collaboration with other institutions dealing with economic issues was now handled in a systematic manner, and supervisors noted improved confidence when participants handled international issues, including WTO issues, as additional duties. Others reported that they are now better informed and positioned to make better decisions.

C. Integration into the organizational structure and political strategy

9. Most supervisors agreed that the participants had been largely integrated into the organizational structure and political strategy of the Departments concerned. An important observation concerns an improvement in the ability to network with other development agencies. One participant has been made responsible for redefining the mission of the International Trade Division of the Department. However, only five supervisors had sought the opinion of the participant on an approach to be taken or a problem to be resolved based on the knowledge and information gained at the course. Correspondingly, only three participants had been requested frequently, and eight others had been asked occasionally, for their opinion or advice. These requests were on issues pertinent to daily work, suggestions and recommendations on various economic issues, WTO issues and the country's position on trade.

10. Most participants too felt that, with a better understanding of international economic issues, their contribution to the work of the department had noticeably improved, with participation in meetings at higher levels and sometimes on behalf of the superior. There had been recognition of contributions from politicians, and participants also reported an improved stature amongst colleagues. One participant reported that, while integration had been negligible, the change in the quality of professional contributions had been noticed in the Department. It appears that, while integration into the organizational structure and political strategy occurred for the majority of the participants, this has been not entirely due to the training course. However, an important observation is that both participants and supervisors witnessed a marked improvement in their contribution at higher-level meetings in their departments.

D. Dissemination of knowledge and information

11. A small number of participants had disseminated knowledge and information extensively to colleagues in their Departments and in other Ministries. Supervisors agreed with this. For these participants, dissemination involved the preparation of briefing papers and formal presentations on international economic issues, particularly issues related to the WTO. One participant reported the use of the training materials in lectures given to the state university and other institutions of education.

12. All other participants, with the exception of one, have shared and disseminated information gained at the training course with colleagues and supervisors in the sending

Departments and other Ministries. This had usually involved assistance on issues pertaining to the training course and brainstorming sessions. When disseminating information, most participants used the publications, documents and CD Rom which they received at the training course.

Chapter II

VALUE ADDED OF THE TRAINING COURSE

13. In assessing the value added of the training course to the work of the participant and that of the sending Department, participants and supervisors were requested to comment on the direct relevance of the training course. Following this, the secretariat also assessed the recognition given for the knowledge and training gained at the training course through the participation of staff in decision-making and whether new or additional responsibilities had been given to participants, including promotions. Comments from both participants and supervisors were also requested regarding the substantive content of the training course.

A. Relevance to job

14. All participants felt that the contents and objectives of the training course had direct relevance to their jobs, as most of them deal with international economic issues on a daily basis. Their analytical skills have been enhanced, including on economic and development issues related to globalization, trade, investment and finance. The knowledge and information gained have also helped in understanding and making various recommendations on policy issues. Similarly, all supervisors were of the opinion that the course has enhanced capacity in policy analysis, with a good blend of administrative skills and trade diplomacy.

B. Decision-making and additional responsibilities

15. Most supervisors already involve participants in decision-making processes in the Department. Participants have been asked to be key actors in decision-making on mergers and cartels, coordinating actions aimed at introducing trade bills to Parliament, and to provide opinions in decision-making processes. However, only seven participants felt that their involvement has been extensive, while others have been asked for limited contributions. Extensive contributions have been by way of specific requests for advice and opinions, including participation in decision-making. One participant, for example has been asked to provide advice to the head of the Department in decision making at the level of the Investment/Industrial Division, while another is in charge of international trade and responsible for guiding the process of reviewing trade laws with respect to WTO principles, regional cooperation, attraction of foreign direct investment and general liberalization of trade.

16. All sending Departments have recognized the value of the information and knowledge gained at this training course. Most participants acknowledge that supervisors are largely satisfied with their training and the improvement in their analytical skills on international economic issues. Many participants have been assigned important work within the Department; one participant reported being responsible for the African Growth and Opportunities Act, while several others have been assigned to represent their Ministry in regional and international meetings. One supervisor reported that there is now collaboration with the national university to design special modules for a Master of Arts course on

international trade. Two participants reported that they had only started working in the Department and hence could not gauge the immediate impact the training course has had in their own work, while another had moved to another institution.

17. Nine supervisors reported that the participants had benefited from a change in their professional status or had taken on new duties. For example, one participant was confirmed in the post of Principal Assistant Secretary, and another was given WTO issues to handle; yet another frequently acts on behalf of the supervisor during his absence from the office. One participant has been assigned as Country Trade and Investment Representative to Washington, and another was made responsible at the National Committee level for charting the way forward in implementing particular WTO Articles. Participants who were not promoted reported that they had been given additional duties and had often been requested to perform special tasks at a higher level. Several participants are also being considered for promotion. Many supervisors approved a promotion or assigned additional duties to participants as part of the Department policy governing successful attendance at training and skills enhancing courses after satisfactory performance and motivation of staff upon return to the Department. Many participants were requested to contribute to the WTO Doha Ministerial Meeting, either directly as participants or indirectly by providing briefing papers, or their opinions on position papers or they were involved in Department level meetings when elaborating positions for the meeting.

18. Many supervisors from sending Departments are satisfied with the overall training course, with the type of knowledge and quality of information imparted to participants, and with the ways in which these have assisted them in their analytical skills, negotiating skills and in one instance defining the mission of a particular division. Several participants have also been promoted, while others have been assigned important tasks within the Department. Many participants are increasingly requested to handle WTO issues, including issues relating to the implementation of the last Ministerial Declaration, and to participate in general policy formulation and provide guidance on trade, finance and investment issues.

C. Comments

19. There was general consensus that the substantive programme of the first training course on international economic issues appeared overloaded due to the extensive coverage of all areas of UNCTAD's work, and the short duration of the course (three weeks for the substantive part of the training course). There was also general agreement that WTO issues need to be addressed further, with requests to provide assistance in negotiations at the multilateral level. LDC participants and supervisors look for follow-up courses in order to add value to the process of training and capacity building in these particular sectors of their administrations. There were requests too for training courses with particular emphasis on issues affecting LDCs, for example market access, competition, investment and the attraction of foreign direct investment. Other departments request further training to include more officials at the senior level for shorter periods, as well as courses of a longer duration for junior officials to absorb the necessary wealth of knowledge and information and to allow for active participation during group discussions. Discussion groups and assignments could

involve resolving practical issues facing developing countries in international trade. In essence, there was a consensus that the duration of the training course, whatever the thematic form, needed to be lengthened in order to allow for absorption and assimilation, including active discussion groups to allow for developing skills in negotiating and problem solving.

20. Participants are encouraged that a network for exchange of information has also been established by the participants, which would prove useful and informative. Many found the course well structured and complete and, along with their supervisors, feel that their understanding has been enriched on various issues, including the development of international markets, trade negotiation skills, understanding of WTO issues and general issues related to the international economy. One participant was particularly impressed with the quality of the information and material provided and the high level of delivery of the UNCTAD trainers.

21. In essence, the secretariat noted that many of the evaluations were consistent with the evaluations made by participants immediately after the course, in particular regarding the relevance of the course content to their jobs, their assimilation of the knowledge and information, and their application of these.